

F

198

.G76

V

Albert Grant's letter
to the Governor.
Washington, 1871.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00012364398



Class F192

Book 5576

GRANT'S LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *August 17th, 1871.*

*His Excellency H. D. Cooke, Governor, and
President of the Board of Public Works:*

SIR: As you and the other members of the Board of Public Works have, by a solemnly sworn statement, in a grave legal proceeding, given currency to a falsehood concerning me, and as the Board and its servants have been busy in maligning and traducing me, and as the misrule and venality of your administration have made this matter very nearly to concern the interests of this community and of the Republican party of the District of Columbia, I regard it my privilege to address you this communication through the public press.

MY REPUBLICANISM AND THAT OF THE BOARD.

From the earliest organization of the Republican party I have been a laborer in its ranks, and I have never faltered in my devotion to the principles that have given life, vigor, progress, and success to that party.

On the outbreak of the rebellion I became a soldier in the army of the Union, and served therein until the close of the war gave again supremacy to the laws of the land. During that time I was familiar with the dangers of the field and the toils and privations of camp and march. I have laid more bridges in the face of the enemy than even your colleague, Colonel Magruder, boasts of having done. I have endured confinement in eleven rebel prisons—twice under the fire of our own batteries—three times escaped, twice recaptured, once standing before a gallows erected by rebels for my execution; at last, after fifty-four days and nights of toilsome journeying, finding shelter and rest in the loyally-hospitable dwelling of Senator Brownlow, at Knoxville.

At the close of the war I settled in Washington to pursue my business as an architect, and if East Capitol street and A street southwest be permitted to testify, it will appear that I have been able to do something for the improvement of Washington. During the time that I have lived here, if I have not done my full share of the labor and expense of maintaining the supremacy of the Republican party, then no man has.

222

Thus much for myself. How is it with you and your colleagues on the Board? With your record hitherto I have no fault to find. You were early in the party, and have done good service. During the terrible struggle that followed the first national triumph of our party, you and those associated with you in your banking business rendered good service in sustaining the credit of the nation, and you were munificently rewarded with abundant piles of Treasury notes. But now, holding the first office in the District of Columbia, you permit men to hold official stations at your will unrebuked to manifest toward the Republicans who gave you the legislative support that you now enjoy, the same spirit that animated Saul when he journeyed from Jerusalem down to Damascus, and you have drawn around you men now sitting squat like toads at your ear, who feel precisely the same interest in the prosperity of the Republican party as did Lucifer in the glory of the kingdom of Heaven.

To two of your colleagues on the Board, Mr. A. R. Shepherd and Mr. A. B. Mullett, I will propound some questions, to the answers to which the Republicans of this District and the President of the United States (if he cares to know who are his friends) will do well to give attention.

The questions are these:

Were not both of you in the lobby of the Democratic Convention in New York in 1868, promising to the leaders of that party aid and support to defeat General Grant, then the nominated candidate of the Republican party?

Did not you, Mr. Mullett, with your characteristic profanity, curse General Grant until the air turned sulphurous blue around you?

Did you not, during the last Presidential campaign, appoint Democratic superintendents over all the extensive Treasury work under your direction, here and in other parts of the country? and did you not have some of them in Western States elected delegates to the Democratic National Convention, and were not the expenses of their journey to Washington, on their way to attend that convention, paid by your direction out of the Treasury of the United States?

Did not you, sir, when an enrolment was in progress, at the very darkest moment of our country's history, seek the protection of the British flag, and did you not secure exemption upon your claim of being a British subject?

Were not you, Mr. Shepherd, during the progress of the trial of Andrew Johnson, one of the loudest and most virulent amongst those who were denouncing Mr. Stanton and General Grant, and Congress and the Republican party? Have you not been laboring for years to deprive the people of this District of all voice in the election of their own local officers? And was it not at the dictation of yourself, the Governor, and Colonel Magruder, that there was stricken from the House of Delegates bill, "creating certain offices in and for the District of Columbia," the

provision granting to this people the poor privilege of electing five out of nearly two hundred officers, thus making, by selfish considerations that are well understood, the majority of the House of Delegates false to their party, and false to the people who elected them? Will these gentlemen answer, and answer truly? or will they compel me to answer, by giving to the public facts and evidences now in my possession?

When Benedict Arnold went into the camp of the enemy he came not back any more. Not so some of these men. They fail in their effort to defeat General Grant and the Republican party, and then—allured by the savor of the flesh-pots—they come sneaking back into the Republican camp, and, by some sort of incomprehensible hocus-pocns, procure the very President, whom they had striven to defeat, to set them up here to dictate and rule over the Republicans of this District. 'Tis strange! 'tis passing strange. I wish he had not done it. I am neither afraid nor ashamed to compare my record with that of any of these men.

IS IT PERJURY?

In your answer, in the Supreme Court of the District, to the application for injunction, occurs the following sentence, viz: "I admit that they (the complainants) are property-owners and tax-payers, except Albert Grant, who, I am informed, has paid no tax in the District." The same statement is contained in the separate answer of the other members of the Board. You all swear that you believe this information to be true. The land records of this District show that some years since I purchased square No. 760, in the City of Washington, bounded by East Capitol and south A streets, and Second and Third streets east. On the A street front of that square, extending from Second to Third street, stands a block of sixteen dwellings, erected by me, that have been finished for more than a year. On the Capitol street front of the same square stands a block of fourteen dwellings, likewise extending from Second to Third street, now being finished by me, and known as Grant's Capitol Block, engravings of which may be seen in many public places in this city.

Some controversy, both in the City Councils and out of them, over the drainage of that property, and over the paving of A street, had attracted attention until it had become notorious in this community, that I owned and was improving that property. In addition to this notoriety, you, sir, had learned, positively learned, in the prosecution of your business as a money lender, that I had owned that square for years. Every member of the Board of Public Works certainly knew that I owned and was improving that square. Did you, sir, believe that I had owned that square for years without paying any taxes upon it? Yet so you and all your colleagues swear you did believe.

I have paid taxes on that property amounting to three thousand four hundred and thirty-three dollars and ninety-eight cents, (\$3,433.98,) and

the unpaid taxes for 1870 amount to five hundred and ninety-six dollars and seventy cents (\$596.70). There is a water tax, paving tax, and sewer tax, on the same property, to become due in instalments, amounting to two thousand one hundred and eighty-one dollars and eighteen cents (\$2,181.18). I have paid taxes on lots 1, 5, and 7, Queen's subdivision of Haddock's Hill, County of Washington, amounting to seventy-nine dollars and fifty cents (\$79.50).

Making a total of taxes paid.....	\$3,518 48
Of taxes assessed and to be paid.....	2,777 88

In all.....	\$6,296 36
-------------	------------

The land records of this District show that I am the owner of, and taxable for, the following property, of the values annexed, viz:

In square 760, lots 16, 17, 18, and 25.....	\$36,000
“ “ “ 1, 8, and 14.....	75,000
“ “ “ 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.....	200,000
“ 765, part of lot 5.....	1,000
“ 727, “ 30.....	3,000
“ 512, “ 23.....	4,000
Lots 1, 5, and 7, Queen's subdivision of Haddock's Hill.....	2,000

Total value.....	\$321,000
------------------	-----------

There was no occasion, legal or otherwise, for the introduction of that falsehood into your answer to the application for injunction, for it was a question not at all material to any issue in the case, whether Albert Grant, one of seventeen complainants, was or was not a proper party to the action, and it was not even alleged to be so by your attorneys. I am unable to discover any motive for the introduction of this falsehood into your answer except innate, unmixed “cussedness.” You and your attorneys must, indeed, have been hard pressed for arguments when you descended to such things. I am willing that this people should judge between you and your colleagues, who have thus gone out of your way to drag this falsehood by solemn affidavit into a legal proceeding, and myself, whom you have maliciously sought to injure.

YOUR PLAN—WHAT IS IT?

The Board transmitted to the Legislature a communication, accompanied with a statement of improvements recommended by you and your colleagues, which, according to your estimates, were to cost \$6,578,397—two-thirds of which you proposed to have at once put into your hands for safe-keeping until you chose to expend it in your own way, and the other third you proposed to assess upon property which you might decide was to be benefited by your improvements, and collect the assessment yourselves, and expend it like the other, just as might please your fancy. In

that "grand system of improvements" (as you are pleased to call it) is the Tiber sewer. You propose, beginning at Pennsylvania avenue, to build a sewer of similar dimensions (similar to what does not exactly appear) along the valley of Tiber Creek to the boundary at Gales', with a branch to old St. Patrick's Burying Ground. Now, one of the results of building this sewer will be to reclaim from the bed of the Tiber more than one and a half millions feet of ground that will be the property of private citizens, and will be worth more than two millions of dollars, and the people at large will be taxed for two-thirds of six hundred and sixty thousand dollars (according to your estimate) to build this sewer for those whose property is not not only to be increased in value, as the usual effect of such improvements, but is to be increased by an area worth more than two millions of dollars. You could not wait until some more just mode of paying for this improvement might be permitted by law; but this item, with its connections, must go in to swell the grand aggregate that you fondly hoped would soon be in the possession of the Board.

Now, please to take your grand system and come with me to the map of the city. Mark the course of this sewer and count the squares through which it passes. You find them to be twenty, and the length of the sewer is set down in your grand system as eleven thousand feet—probably not very far from correct. Now, beginning at Pennsylvania avenue, count the squares through which this sewer passes until you have counted four. Here you find yourself at the intersection of E and North Capitol streets. Now count the squares from this point along North Capitol street to Boundary. They are eleven. Turn to your grand system, and there you find a sewer along these eleven squares likewise set down as having a length of eleven thousand feet. You will agree with me that this is just as probably not correct. The grand system that you sent to the Legislature is besprinkled all over with just such blunders (if they are blunders, and not intentional) as this. This manifests one of two things—an inexcusable ignorance and incompetency, or a wilful purpose to deceive and defraud somebody.

Again: This sewer is to have a branch up what you are pleased to call the northeastern valley, almost to Mr. Shepherd's farm, at an expense of twelve dollars per lineal foot, with connections in nearly every direction, certainly in every direction where lies a foot of ground owned by any member of the Board or of the Ring that surrounds it.

Would you know who that Ring are? Go to the land records of the District and procure the names of speculators who have purchased real estate just beyond Boundary street, and on or near Water street; add the names of all persons not already on the list, who belong to the Seneca Stone Company, and the Metropolitan Paving Company; add also a few members of the House of Delegates, and you have *nearly* all of the speculating gang by whom you are surrounded, who give directions to and

control your administration. Would you see them? They salute you whenever you enter your club-house on E street, west of Ninth, at evening. There some portion of them may be seen any evening contemplating your grand system with intense satisfaction, and devising further means to deceive and defraud this people.

You have by this sewer and its connections provided liberally for the drainage of the Tiber valley, at an expense of about one-and-a-quarter millions; but even this does not seem to satisfy your friends who devised the grand system. Turn to your map. From the point where the west branch of the Tiber sewer reaches Boundary street it is but a little distance along that street to a point where another branch of the Tiber crosses the boundary at Eighth street. According to your grand system, here in the bed of one of the branches of the Tiber is to begin one of your main sewers. If you follow its course seven squares you will find yourself on the crest of the ridge that divides the water-shed of the Tiber from that of Rock Creek, just four squares from the point of greatest altitude of the grades of the city; and through this ridge, after expending a million and a quarter to drain the Tiber valley in another direction, you propose to drain a portion of that valley into Rock Creek, at an expense of two hundred and ninety-eight thousand dollars. If you follow the course of this sewer, (and it will remind you of the tortuous way of a sick snake,) you will find at last that it reaches Rock Creek by a course that is a little west of north at a point where the course of that stream is just about as much east of south, and you will be in doubt whether the sewer is to empty into the creek or the creek into the sewer. Now, will you please to take your map and your grand system and return with me to the head of this sewer. Traveling along Boundary street westwardly, we pass on the right, eligible suburban lots and beautiful villas (property of the Ring) over the course of the sewer on Boundary street, to be constructed for the benefit of these lots and villas in the country, until we come to Fourteenth street, where we find ourselves on the highest ground in the city. Eligible point this; let us take an observation. Look to the north, northeast, and west. Nearly all those broad acres, those rising villages, those stately trees, are the property of the Ring. Yonder to the west of you lies the ground that the Board intend (when they shall have made it sufficiently valuable) to sell to the United States for a grand park. Now look to the south, and you see before you a sparsely-settled, unimproved portion of the city, entirely unsuited to lie between the most valuable possessions of the Ring and the business portion of the city. Turn to your system, and from this point the stately grandeur of its selfishness appears.

Eighth street, Ninth street, Tenth street, Eleventh street, Twelfth street, Thirteenth street, Fourteenth street, Fifteenth street, Sixteenth street, Seventeenth street, Eighteenth street, Nineteenth street, Twentieth street, Twenty-first street, and Twenty-second street, from Boundary southward, and W street, V street, U street, and T street, S street, R street, Q street, P street, O street, and N street, from Boundary to Boundary, or from Seventh street west to Boundary, and Boundary itself, from Ninth to

Twenty-second street, all to be sewered and otherwise improved at an expense of about one and half millions, although on some of them not a house or a shanty appears for considerable distances to mark the course of the street. You will probably agree with me that these facts need no explanation. They explain themselves and their relations to the grand system.

You will probably now be willing to turn your attention with me to the riverside, for you have possessions there, and so have some of your colleagues. At this point your grand system begins to exhibit the modesty of the Board. Tired of enumerating improvements, to be made at public expense, for your especial benefit, here around water-lots and sliding sea-walls, (a late invention of your engineers,) you chuck in at once three hundred thousand dollars for improvements and repairs in the Eleventh and Eighteenth Districts. I fail to find in your grand system one single cent thus set down as for improvements and repairs in any one of the other twenty legislative districts. But here, where our possessions lie! Ah! Governor! the allurements of the world and the deceitfulness of riches! Good Lord, deliver us!

You have not forgotten the lands of the Ring on the Eastern Branch, but have taken good care to provide for all the streets that touch the Boundary at that point, while you appear to be entirely ignorant of the fact that one and a half miles to the westward of that point stands a building that some persons recognize as the Capitol of the United States. Your grand system avoids the more busy and better settled portions of the city, and with charming modesty seeks its outer portions—Boundary being its favorite street.

In your system, sewers, pavements, footways, and all the parts of it, tend to the same object—the enhancement of the value of the property owned by the Board and the Ring of satellites that revolves around it.

That part of the city around the Capitol seems to have been forgotten, and that part of the city bordering on Pennsylvania avenue, between the Capitol and the Treasury, is scarcely referred to; but all those parts of the city that are near the property of the Ring, or that lie between their property and the busy parts of the city, have been amply provided for, in order that the approaches to your property and that of your friends may be perfected; and if you are permitted to carry out your grand system, you will be the five richest men in the District of Columbia. Your system is not a system for the improvement of the District. Indeed, there is little system for any purpose about it except for that which I have already charged, and for a wanton expenditure of public money, with no advantage to accrue to anybody but yourselves and the contractors. It is characterized throughout by ignorance and deceit. It is filled with errors of measurement and errors of estimate, both of which are characteristic of the two men whose names are appended to it.

If you will make these improvements according to your plan, I now make to you this proposition: I will enter into contract, and give bond in the sum of three millions of dollars, with security to be approved by you, to make all the improvements named in your system for the sum of four-and-a-half millions of dollars, two-thirds of which, or three millions, to be paid in bonds of the District of Columbia *at par*, and the remaining one-third to be assessed according to law on the property benefited by the improvements, and collected by me: and I will agree to pay two dollars per day for all labor employed. If you give me this contract,

you will save the taxpayers of the District two million and seventy-eight thousand three hundred and ninety-seven (2,078,397) dollars, according to your own estimate, and to the laborers employed fifty cents on each day's work. Will you do it?

Your system totally disregards the water-sheds of the city of Washington as established by law. Is this because no member of the Board of Public Works is a resident of this city? Are your engineers ignorant of the fact that it is scarcely possible to improve the water-sheds of this city to any considerable extent, without an expense that could not be borne by the property of this city? Or are you willing, for selfish ends, to put us in a position from which it would require the expenditure of large sums to bring us back to the point in our improvements where we now are?

I can come to no other conclusion than that your grand system is conceived with a deliberate design to deceive and defraud this people.

Your proposition, when stripped of its ornaments, its claptrap, and all of its devices to deceive, is simply a proposition for this people to put into your hands six millions five hundred and seventy-eight thousand three hundred and ninety-seven (6,578,397) dollars, to be expended just as you please, without hindrance or control, or questions to be asked by anybody, without order or system.

By your own published grand system, you practically admit your purpose to expend more than four millions of the amount asked for almost solely for the benefit of the Board and its friends.

For months you have fed this people on promises to secure better engineering skill; you have appeared before the courts of the District with a sworn statement of the names of eminent engineers, of whose services you swore you intended to avail yourselves. And yet you stick to your system (which those engineers cannot approve) with a pertinacity worthy of a better cause, and we hear nothing of any other.

Your operations, which should be in the broad light of day, in the full view of the people, are conducted in secrecy and mystery. You carefully exclude from your meetings, when you consider public affairs, those faithful servants of the people, the reporters of the public press.

Can you wonder, under such circumstances, that the mind of this people is filled with suspicion; that neither courts nor people are willing to trust you?

I shall claim the privilege of addressing you again within the coming week, when I shall endeavor to point out more in detail the iniquities of your grand system; when I shall endeavor to show you that by your system the greater burden of taxation will fall upon that property which is of lowest value, and, hence, less able to bear it; that your system, if carried out, cannot fail to result disastrously to the interests of the laboring masses of this people; and that the Board of Public Works and its retainers are not the real friends of the improvement of the District.

I will also explain to you a system, which, if adopted, will secure a rapid, economical, and safe improvement of all parts of the District, without distressing any taxpayer, and with justice to all; that will give a healthful stimulus to all kind of business, and tend, in some degree, to bring happiness and content to all classes of this people.

I am, sir,

ALBERT GRANT.

